

AN ACT

RELATING TO VITAL STATISTICS; PROVIDING THAT A REGISTERED NURSE EMPLOYED BY A HOSPITAL MAY PRONOUNCE THE DEATH OF A PATIENT IN CERTAIN CIRCUMSTANCES.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF NEW MEXICO:

Section 1. Section 24-14-20 NMSA 1978 (being Laws 1961, Chapter 44, Section 18, as amended) is amended to read:

"24-14-20. DEATH REGISTRATION. --

A. A death certificate for each death that occurs in this state shall be filed within five days after the death and prior to final disposition. The death certificate shall be registered by the state registrar if it has been completed and filed in accordance with this section, subject to the exception provided in Section 24-14-24 NMSA 1978; provided that:

(1) if the place of death is unknown but the dead body is found in this state, a death certificate shall be filed with a local registrar within ten days after the occurrence. The place where the body is found shall be shown as the place of death. If the date of death is unknown, it shall be approximated by the state medical investigator; and

(2) if death occurs in a moving conveyance

in the United States and the body is first removed from the conveyance in this state, the death shall be registered in this state and the place where the body is first removed shall be considered the place of death. When a death occurs on a moving conveyance while in international waters or air space or in a foreign country or its air space and the body is first removed from the conveyance in this state, the death shall be registered in this state, but the certificate shall show the actual place of death insofar as can be determined by the state medical investigator.

B. The funeral service practitioner or person acting as a funeral service practitioner who first assumes custody of a dead body shall file the death certificate. He shall obtain the personal data from the next of kin or the best qualified person or source available. He shall obtain the medical certification of cause of death.

C. The medical certification shall be completed and signed within forty-eight hours after death by the physician in charge of the patient's care for the illness or condition that resulted in death, except when inquiry is required by law. Except as provided in Subsection D of this section, in the absence of the physician, or with his approval, the medical certification may be completed and signed by his associate physician, the chief medical officer of the institution in which death occurred or the physician who performed an autopsy on the decedent, provided that

individual has access to the medical history of the case, views the deceased at or after death, and death is due to natural causes.

D. Unless there is reasonable cause to believe that the death is not due to natural causes, a registered nurse employed by a nursing home may pronounce the death of a resident of the nursing home and a registered nurse employed by a hospital may pronounce the death of a patient of the hospital. The nurse shall have access to the medical history of the case and view the deceased at or after death, and the individual who completes the medical certification shall not be required to view the deceased at or after death. The death shall be pronounced pursuant to procedures or facility protocols prescribed by the hospital for patients or by the physician who is the medical director of the nursing home for residents. The procedures or facility protocols shall ensure that the medical certification of death is completed in accordance with the provisions of Subsection C of this section.

E. For purposes of this section:

(1) "nursing home" means any nursing institution or facility required to be licensed under state law as a nursing facility by the public health division of the department of health, whether proprietary or nonprofit, including skilled nursing home facilities; and

(2) "hospital" means a public hospital,

profit or nonprofit private hospital or a general or special hospital that is licensed as a hospital by the department of health.

F. When death occurs without medical attendance as set forth in Subsection C or D of this section or when death occurs more than ten days after the decedent was last treated by a physician, the case shall be referred to the state medical investigator for investigation to determine and certify the cause of death.

G. An amended death certificate based on an anatomical observation shall be filed within thirty days of the completion of an autopsy. "_____